

# QUIET NO MORE

By Dawn Chafe



If you had asked me last year, I would have said we didn't need an issue like this. Certainly not now, and definitely not in Canada. I might even have laughed a little at the quaint old-fashionedness of the notion.

"Women," I would have smugly said, "women in this beautifully open-minded, socially advanced nation can go anywhere, achieve anything. We are strong, we are powerful, we are appreciated."

I would have noted that today's generation of men fully respects women as equals. I might even have paraphrased our Prime Minister's almost incredulous response at being asked why gender equity was so important in his cabinet appointments. His three simple words, "Because it's 2016," were a derisive indictment of anyone Neanderthal-enough to even consider anything less.

I would have argued that women are their own worst enemies and that the only thing holding us back is our own lack of confidence.

I would have been right — to a point.

Women often are their own Waterloo, declining personal honours and downplaying their own brilliance. Over the past few months, I've heard from dozens of successful women who say it's all about the attitude. We are not victims, they say. "We don't believe in gender quotas. We don't want to be the token woman in the C-suite. We want to make it there on our own merit."

Leadership gender parity is apparently only a mindset away. If only we would "lean in" more... if only we pushed harder... if only women did more to support other women... if only we thought ourselves worthy of a place at the table... if only it wasn't so much rubbish.

Female reticence alone doesn't explain why almost half the Canadian companies on the Toronto Stock Exchange don't have even ONE woman on their board of directors. Nor does it justify the complete absence of women on the executive teams of 43 per cent of this country's 700 publicly-traded companies. You read that right: women — who make up roughly half the population, who are more than well represented in post-secondary and entry level jobs — are completely MIA in any sort of senior leadership capacity for almost half of our publicly-traded companies.

A lot of people argue that outright misogyny is a thing of the past. Until recently, I thought that myself. But too many events over the past year demonstrate that it's not gone — it was just hiding. A series of articles about women's issues by *Telegram* reporter Tara Bradbury saw her inbox flooded with hateful, sexist remarks. Well-publicized FHRITP comments (you'll have to look

that up for yourself if you don't know what it is) towards female public personalities have been dismissed as "jokes." Because rape is SO funny.

Even the Twitter ads promoting this particular issue has been met with ridicule. Apparently, we should "build a wall" to keep women out of business. And a depressing number of Canadian men believe there'd be more jobs for them if only women would "get the hell out of the workforce." The most succinct arguments simply told me to "fuck off".

I find it curious that our male Prime Minister can proclaim he's a feminist and the world applauds, but a woman (or a magazine) with the same label has to defend herself.

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For the record, feminism, by definition, is a quest for equality. It's not about empowering one gender over another, or at the expense of another. It's a call to action to capitalize on our collective strengths. That's certainly the purpose of this special edition of *Atlantic Business Magazine*.

I know some of you will accuse me of reverse discrimination because this issue is blatantly, dominantly, about women. But think about it: almost every issue in our 28-year history has been nearly, or exclusively, about male executives and entrepreneurs. It was never an intentional slight and that's the point: being gender blind is almost as dangerous as active sexism. Ignoring the issue doesn't solve anything. Let's talk.

Dawn Chafe started with *Atlantic Business Magazine* as a freelancer 22 years ago, becoming editor in 1998.

#### FEEDBACK

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